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SUBJECT: SHOWDOWN LOOMS AT UPCOMING PNCR BIENNIAL CONGRESS

11. (U) SUMMARY: At next week's People's National Congress Reform (PNCR) Biennial Congress, a contest for the leadership of the party looms between incumbent Robert Corbin and long-time party stalwart Vincent Alexander. While Alexander has been very public in his push for a change in leadership, Corbin has calmly stressed the need for cohesion in the party. PNCR membership, almost non-existent following the party's poor showing in the 2006 national elections, has swelled during the last two weeks in anticipation of the leadership showdown. The party's last-minute refusal to engage in a verification of the members list has Alexander fuming. END SUMMARY

12. (U) The contest for the leadership of the PNCR is down to a fight between incumbent Robert Corbin and former Vice-Chairman Vincente Alexander. This two-man contest has been anticipated since Alexander announced his push for leadership of the party earlier this summer. In an interview with Poloff, Alexander said that the PNCR must change its approach, focusing more on the needs of its constituents, in order to regain momentum lost after the 2006 elections. He also said that he will introduce motions at the congress aimed at reforming the role of the party leader -- one such motion would limit party leadership to a maximum of six consecutive years. In response, Corbin has stated that the upcoming three-day Biennial Congress, scheduled to start July 20, is too important to be reduced to personalities. Corbin has continually attempted to deflect talk of a showdown between himself and Alexander, stating that the focus of the congress should not be about the vote, but "is really for the future cohesion and strengthening of the PNCR over the next 50 years."

13. (SBU) A dramatic surge in party membership over the last three weeks has many PNCR members worried about the authenticity of their membership list. Since the 2006 national elections, active party membership has remained at approximately 3,000. Within the last three weeks, however, it has swelled to more than 23,000. While party membership normally grows prior to the Biennial Congress, it usually tops out at 10,000. This change has many PNCR members worried that the list has been fraudulently padded in order to rig the results of the upcoming leadership vote. To make matters worse, the PNCR Central Executive Committee voted last week to forgo the planned verification of the membership roster. Alexander told Poloff that his backers have investigated a sampling of the incoming membership applications and they have determined that many are fictitious. He further stated that there are strong ties between Corbin's backers and the list of fictitious applications.

14. (SBU) Alexander went public with his call for verification of the list after his private plea to the Central Executive

Committee was ignored. He told Poloff that he has three options: (1) take the issue to court; (2) not participate in party elections; or (3) raise the issue to the party members at the congress. Acknowledging that legal action could take years to complete, and option 2 would definitively result in defeat, Alexander seemed resigned to trying option 3.

15. (SBU) In order to get a more unbiased view, Poloff also spoke with Winston Murray, another long-time PNCR executive member. Murray expressed great concern about the possibility of fraudulent membership applications, but was resigned to the fact that there was not enough time left before the congress to adequately verify the list. He also expressed concern about the manner in which Alexander was handling the situation-- he said that this is the first time that internal PNCR party politics had been brought out into the public. "This does not bode well for the future" commented Murray.

16. (SBU) COMMENT: Although the irony appears to be lost on them, the PNCR's refusal to verify its own party membership list, after continuously calling for house-to-house verification of the national voter's list, is yet another sign of the party's state of disarray and decline. One of the main reasons that the PNCR lost ground in last year's national election is that many younger Guyanese are put off by the party's old guard leadership and its failure to make room for fresh leaders and fresh ideas. As there was no place for them in the party leadership, young voters cast their votes elsewhere. This battle for leadership between two longtime PNCR stalwarts likely will not help change people's perceptions of the party.
Robinson